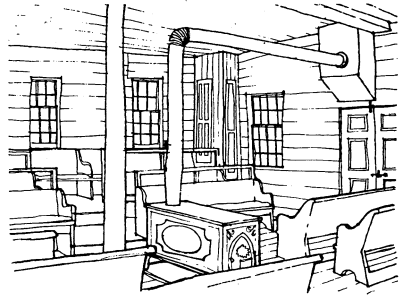


SHARON TEMPLE

AND THE CHILDREN OF PEACE

Although Friends came to Newfoundland as early as 1656, and others tried to settle along the Atlantic coast, permanent settlement did not occur until the late 1700s when Friends came into Ontario from New York, Vermont and Pennsylvania. Three main settlements occurred, Yonge Street, Pelham and West Lake. Yonge Street is the main road north of Toronto, and Friends settled at Newmarket, 30 miles to the north of Toronto, then called York. The Quaker families of Yonge Street were subsistence farmers whose production was oriented towards meeting family consumption, not market demands.



The Yonge Street meetinghouse is of traditional design, with a division between the men and women which can be raised for worship. It is a one storey building with wooden siding and a shingled roof, lovingly restored in the last thirty years. It has facing benches with one door wide enough to accommodate a coffin and its bearers.

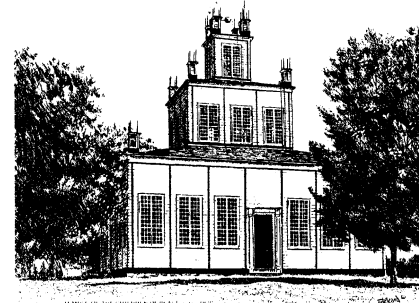
In the early 1800s, the tensions which were dividing American Friends also divided Canadian Friends.

Canadian Quakers also found themselves caught up in the tensions of a rapidly changing colonial world in which market competition and politics were at odds with their testimonies. In 1812 Canada was at war with the United States and Yonge Street was declared to be a military road, with expectations of support of food and lodging for passing troops. The Quakers struggled over whether to swear allegiance to the crown, join the militia, pay a tax for not joining the militia, or feed the troops.

One of their ongoing tensions centred round David Willson whose ministry was not well received by a small segment of the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting. He resigned his membership when two elders forbade him to speak in meetings for worship. In 1812, he opened his own home to meetings for worship and was joined by 6 others. They formed the Children of Peace, which rapidly grew as the war progressed, until finally about one quarter of the members of the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting had joined it.

Following the War of 1812, the members of the group moved to the village of Hope (now Sharon). The focal point of the village was a new meetinghouse they built on David Willson's farm in 1819. Through cooperative marketing, the establishment of a credit union, and a land sharing system, the Children of Peace became prosperous farmers in an era when new farmers frequently failed.

In 1816, the Children of Peace developed their own discipline which marked a radical break with Quakerism. Rejecting the strict pacifist stance of the Quakers, they began to use music in worship. They started to market wheat for profit, though at a fixed price.



The Temple built between 1825 and 1832 was the greatest project of the Children of Peace. The design was based on Solomon's Temple and on the new Jerusalem as described in the book of Revelation. Equality was represented by the building being four square with doors to the north, south, east and west, so all could enter on equal footing. Within each entrance was a large basin for donations which were used to support the poor.

The Temple has three storeys, representing the Trinity. The upper stories are supported by twelve pillars, each with a plaque bearing the name of one of the twelve apostles, representing the foundation of the Christian church. Inside these pillars are four pillars representing the foundations on which the Children of Peace were built: faith, hope, love and charity. At each corner of each roof is a lantern symbolic of the twelve apostles going out to preach to the world. Suspended from the upper lanterns is a large golden globe with the word "Peace" inscribed on it. The interior is illuminated by 2,952 panes of glass, letting the light of the gospel fall equally on all assembled.

The second floor of the Temple is a musicians' gallery reached by climbing Jacob's Ladder, the ladder to heaven, a difficult task for men carrying brass instruments. The third storey is a cupola which allows sunlight to flow down the central well linking the three levels.

At the same time as the Temple was being built, the Children of Peace built and opened the first shelter for the homeless in Upper Canada.

In 1820, the Children of Peace commissioned the first barrel organ built in Canada with two wooden barrels, each with ten tunes which was played like a player piano. The group had its own brass band, supplemented by stringed instruments, the first non-military band in Upper Canada, plus a choir of virgins. Willson rejected the hierarchy of the facing bench and each person purchased their own chair, equal to everyone else.

In the centre of the Temple the Ark of the Covenant represents the presence of God. Square, like the temple, it has an ornate lamp on each corner of its roof. The Bible sat in the centre, open at the Ten Commandments. In 1990, a compartment was found in the ark with hundreds of "female" hymns, in addition to sermons and information on David Willson. Still missing are the huge alms bowls which were placed at each side of the ark to collect money for the poor. The group avoided congregational singing of the sort performed by other denominations. They never repeated a hymn. The constant production of music, like manna from heaven, was a sign of its sacred origin. At the beginning and end of each worship service, Willson would "read out" a hymn line by line, which would then be sung back by a choir, and then the congregation, necessary because each hymn was new. The lining out of hymns was a traditional singing style which had been the primary form of congregational singing in New England until 1720. These songs were usually sung *acappella*, resulting in "slow, improvised singing in which each singer was allowed to decorate the tunes as he or she saw fit."

The Temple was used only fifteen times a year, on the last Sabbath of each month for an alms service, for the Passover in June, and a special candle-lit "illumination" and the feast of the first fruits in September. The illumination continues today on the first weekend in September with candles lit in all the windows and turrets, representing the light of the gospel. Sect members fasted before services and were called to worship by a trumpet. David Willson never entered the Temple, symbolizing that the word of God was central and a mediating priesthood was unnecessary. Sermons were read by his son.

Myths have developed around the building process. One is that the Temple is built without nails, fulfilling 1 Kings 6:7. Although the framework has no nails, using timber frame construction with mortice and tenon joints and wooden pegs, there are thousands of nails used to secure lath, flooring, siding and trim. Another myth states that the Temple was built from pre-fabricated parts which were dragged by sled to the site in winter. Although timbers were trimmed at source, building occurred on site.

Willson's concern for the poor led him to make increasingly radical forays into Upper Canadian politics. He took the Children of Peace in regular processions through Toronto,

to preach in both meetings for worship and at political gatherings of reformers. His message revolved around the injustice practised towards the world by those who possessed an abundant share of the good things of life; that they were all usurpers, that all humankind were equal, and that it was the duty of the poor to pull down the rich.

Willson's behaviour cannot be understood except in contrast to the colonial government-supported "hireling clergy" of the Anglican Church which was closely associated with the "family compact" which ruled the province. Willson's refusal to accept a salary as a minister was in contrast to the Anglicans' control of the funds derived from the clergy reserves, one seventh of all land in the province. His dressing in rags was in contrast to the expected demeanor of an ordained minister of God's word.

In 1837 the Mackenzie Rebellion broke out in Upper Canada. The rebellion aimed to establish a democratic republic free from colonial interference, and was stimulated by several years of low prices for wheat sales. Some members of the Children of Peace joined the rebellion which ended after a single clash on Yonge Street. Two sect members were killed in the clash, others were fined and jailed. Many members left the group.

By the early 1840s the name of the village was changed to Sharon and the sect was becoming more like a regular protestant denomination. Newer members had no interest in pacifism. Unison singing was introduced, hymn books were published and a new church order was adopted.

The census of 1851 shows that Sharon was the most prosperous farming community in the province. Willson's concern for the poor had induced them to use the funds they raised in the Temple to help the weaker members of the sect. As the weak blossomed, they too were able to help others, leading to the general prosperity of all members. Energy once used to build the Temple and meetinghouses was now devoted to broader civil responsibilities including the temperance movement.

Following Willson's death in 1866, his son John took over, reading his father's sermons during worship. In 1876 the Children of Peace became a charitable society with a board of trustees and in 1889 the few remaining Children of Peace joined the Presbyterian Church.

Today one can visit Sharon Temple and see the building, with Jacob's ladder, chairs with members' names under the seats, the ark, the organs, the sheet music and some of the band instruments, preserved as a historic site. Concerts are held in the summer.